

Updated Minutes
Program Simplification Workgroup
November 14, 2002
Room 225 NW – Capitol

Attendees:

Carol Amelong, DHCF/BIMA
Christopher Conor, DOA
Alesia Daniel, Milwaukee Co.
Monica Danley, UMOS
Joan Ellenbecker, DWS/OCC
Joanne Faber, Washington Co.
Jon Janowski, HTF – Milwaukee
Vicki Jessup, DHCF/BHCE

John LaPhilliph, DCHF/BHCE
Carol Medaris, WCCF
Wendy Metcalf, Marquette Co.
Sara Pynenberg, DHCF/BIMA
Marilyn Rudd, DHCF/BIMA
Sara Shackleton, Dane Co.
Rick Zynda, DHCF/BIMA

Teleconference:

Richard Buschmann, Advocate
Shirin Cabraal, LAW

▪ **Introductions – Rick**

Joan Ellenbecker, from the Office of ChildCare, was introduced to the sub-committee as a new member.

▪ **Approve October Minutes – All**

Rick asked for any additions or corrections to the October minutes, none offered, the minutes were approved.

▪ **Application Revision Project Status – Sara/Amy**

Sara Pynenberg handed out drafts of the new FS application form and the revised “Help Guide”.

Due to a very tight timeframe, the last date for accepting revisions to the FS application was November 11, 2002. The final draft is currently being reviewed by DHFS for form standards.

The newly created FS Application form is a **back-up** form for use:

- when CARES is not available at the local agency or application site;
- when a worker is doing a home visit without a laptop; and
- when SSA offices provide them to SSI households. (It is a federal requirement that SSA offices be able to provide SSI clients with a form to request the food stamp benefit. The SSA offices currently supply clients with our Combined Application Form (CAF) DES-2035. This application form is out of date.)
- Page one of the new FS application form is a tear-off and can be used to set a filing date.
- The new FS application form will be made available on-line for downloading before it is available in printed form. **(Would IMAC prefer a downloaded document for local agency printing?)**
- Form revisions will be made in the future, as needed, based on input from customers and agencies, as was the case with the one-page Family Medicaid/BadgerCare application form.

The revised food stamp “Help Guide” – now includes rights and responsibilities information. The brochure will be used as an outreach tool, provided to pantries and advocacy groups, and in conjunction with applications. This is in draft form, and is also being reviewed by DHFS. The new “Help Guide” will be made available on-line for downloading before it is available in printed form.

Our Committee members were concerned with the reading level for the two documents. We have little flexibility with some of the language within the application form, due to USDA-FNS mandating use of their verbiage. However, the Help Guide may be written in a more user-friendly style. Both documents will be reviewed for readability by Department staff.

▪ **Communications Workgroup Status – Amy**

- Amy Mendel-Clemens leads this workgroup. Prior to the meeting Amy spoke with Rick and indicated that, at this time, there was nothing new to share with our members. More next month.

▪ **Asset Policy/Issue Paper Status- Sara**

- The USDA-FNS issued guidance on what the Farm Bill option would allow State's to include/exclude in their definition of countable assets. The FNS guidance included "the availability of stocks and bonds" in their definition of income/assets that must be counted. The Department is sending a letter to the USDA-FNS, requesting a review of the legislative intent by their General Counsel. Our response is meant to test the FNS definition of income and assets, and to test the flexibility states will be allowed in aligning the FSP with MA.
- Our data demonstrates that the majority of food stamp households have an average of \$140 in assets.
- Some people don't apply for the FSP because they believe they would be found over in assets. CARES data only records application denials, it doesn't reflect data where no application is made.

▪ **FS/Medicaid Income Policy/Issue Paper Status – Sara/Vicki**

- Counting Student Financial Aid as unearned income will be eliminated in food stamp policy, beginning January 1, 2003. CARES will be programmed to process this change in February 2003. A policy change without CARES support is not the state's preference, but it is our only option if this is to be available for second semester.
- Policy changes regarding the simplified definition of counted income is currently being considered by both MA/FS staff at DHFS. Medicaid must take the lead, and if they receive permission to implement this policy change the Farm Bill allows the FSP to align its policy with MA. BHCE staff are gathering data to demonstrate the fiscal impact of this policy change. If the impact is insignificant, the committee will recommend that DHFS grant their approval. BHCE's only requirement is to inform the federal Center for Medicaid & Medicare Services (CMS) of their policy change.

▪ **Child Support Payments Status – Sara –**

Child Support payments from non-custodial-parents (NCPs) in FS households to support children outside of the household, are not prevalent. However, collecting the Child Support information for a client review is very time consuming for the worker.

- The FSP is considering redefining how to count Child Support **payments** made by the FS household to someone outside of the household.

Currently these payments are counted as an income **deduction** in the FS eligibility determination. The Farm Bill allows the payments to be **excluded** from gross income prior to the gross income test. However, more discussion is necessary to determine the possible impact on QC error determinations that this policy change might influence.

- We are also looking at automation in this area – CARES obtain the data from KIDS and populates the appropriate fields. This is something in the future as it would likely be an expensive process to automate.

We also wish to note a recent change in FS Child Support income policy, when the custodial parent in a FS household is **receiving** a payment -

- In April 2002 Wisconsin received approval for a waiver allowing a \$100 variance in reporting Child Support **income**. This Child Support budgeting policy appears, from the data QC has seen to date, to be reducing errors.

- **Change Reporting Options - Sara**

- Discuss pros/cons
- We began discussing the pros and cons of various options for change reporting policies. The first of many issues discussed was the old Monthly Reporting Forms (MRFs), and Retrospective Budgeting. Whenever the issue of change reporting is raised, some state and local staff suggest returning to MRFs. Sara feels it is important to discuss this method of change reporting fully, and either put it forward as a viable error reduction tool, or eliminate it from further discussion. The majority of the committee did not feel this was a viable option, primarily due to the workload issues. Data has not proven that this method reduces errors.

The conclusion of our workgroup was that a chart should be created laying out all of the change reporting alternatives, and the consequences of those choices. Marilyn Rudd will assist Sara in creating a spreadsheet for our next meeting.

- **Next Meeting – Date/Time**

- December 12 – 12:30 – 3:00 p.m., State Capitol, room 225NW